

Fatima bint Muhammad (d. 632)

Fatima was the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, wife of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, and the mother of al-Hasan and al-Husayn. She was probably born around 605 C.E... Fatima has been so called because, it is believed, she, her descendants and supporters, will be spared from Hell, or because she was exempt from evil, or because she was removed from polytheism. Since the Shi‘i Imams come from the lineage of al-Husayn, Fatima is considered to be the mother of all the Imams.

She has been venerated by all Muslims. This may be because she was closest to her father and gave him numerous descendants, who are called sayyids. It is customary to add to her name the honorific title al-Zahra’, “the radiant One”.

Legends surround Fatima’s birth and life. She is pure and spotless; while in her mother’s womb, she conversed with her. At the moment of Fatima’s birth, light spread over the sky and the earth, to the West and to the East. She is depicted as free from menstruation. She is also reportedly the mistress of the women of the worlds, and a human *hourī*. Several miracles were worked by Fatima: the stone for grinding corn turned without anyone moving it, an angel rocked her baby’s cradle. Fatima will be the first person to enter Paradise after the Resurrection. All will have to lower their gaze when she crosses the Bridge which leads across Hell to Paradise. She will be escorted by seventy houris. In Paradise she will proceed, mounted on a wondrous camel with legs of emerald, eyes of ruby, etc., under a dome of light.

Historically, Fatima is seen as one who supported father especially when he was persecuted in Mecca. She removed the refuse which the enemy had flung over the Prophet while he was praying; she is also referred to as “Umm Abiha”, the mother of her father. Her status in

Islam is immense. The Prophet is reported to have said that "Fatima is a part of me. Whosoever hurts her, has hurt me, and whosoever hurts me has hurt God."

Many companions wanted Fatima's hand in marriage but the Prophet refused. Traditions state that her marriage to 'Ali was decreed by God. The angel Gabriel reportedly asked Muhammad to marry her to 'Ali as that was God's wish.

After the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakr went with some companions towards Fatima's house. The newly-elected caliph wanted to obtain the homage of these dissidents, but 'Ali went to confront him with sword drawn, and Fatima, when seeing that the party was about to enter her house, raised such cries and threatened to uncover her hair that Abu Bakr withdrew. She is seen as oppressed since Abu Bakr denied her the land (called Fadak) that was bequeathed to her by her father. Fatima was also distressed because, according to Shi'i literature, 'Ali's rights to the leadership of the community were denied by Abu Bakr and 'Umar. Fatima's death is said to have been caused by 'Umar forcing open the door to her house, and Fatima, reportedly pregnant, was injured and finally died of her injuries. Fatima died shortly after the death of her father. She would experience a life of suffering and the majority of her immediate family would be martyred.

Due to her and her family's suffering, she becomes a role model for those standing up to injustice and oppression. On the day of Judgment, Fatima will be compensated for her suffering by being granted the power to save all those who asked her for intercession.

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